

# HERITAGE STATEMENT HOUSE 85

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The statement is a supplement to the application for a permit for repairs and maintenance to the exterior of the structure to be made to SAHRA in terms of the National Heritage Resources Act, 25 of 1999.

## 2. LOCATION



## 3. SITE PLANS

Fig.3.1.  
Cluster of 4  
houses 83-86.



Fig.3.2. House 85, 86 showing difference in shape And position of outbuildings



#### **4. FLOOR PLAN**

No floor plan was drawn or researched in the limited time available.

#### **5. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE AND VALUE**

Built as one of four residences for the warders during the mid 1970's and later housed the RIM crèche.

#### **6. EXPANDED STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE AND VALUE**

##### **6.1. ARCHITECTURAL**

The style and decoration is functional modernism dating from the mid 1970's. The building has a T shape, which distinguishes it from the rectangular shapes of the other 3 houses in the cluster. The garage and outbuildings are also placed behind the main building as opposed the other 3 houses, which have their outbuildings along the side. The verandah is markedly different from that of the other 3 houses in the cluster.

##### **6.1.1. EXTERIOR**

Built from Robben Island brick [refer to technological significance] and mortar, smooth plastered walls, two uncovered verandahs on east and on north faces with pergola consisting of Roman type concrete columns on square brick and mortar plinths, SA pine beams integrated with main house walls, verandah floors from Malmesbury shale quarried on the island, Asbestos roofing, fascia, gutters, downpipes and water tanks. Main Entrance doors from Meranti with glass panes, window frames standard steel. Enclosed courtyard integrates main building with outbuildings. Malmesbury shale and concrete apron around and along walls of house.



Fig.6.1.& 6.2 . NE corner left, east face right



Fig.6.3.& 6.4. SE corner left, NW corner right



Fig.6.5. West face garage & servants quarters Fig.6.6.&6.7. Verandah E face left, N face right

### 6.1.2. INTERIOR

No survey of the interior was done for lack of time.

### 6.1.3. ASSOCIATED LANDSCAPE

#### Outbuildings

Consist of garage and servants quarters. No detailed survey undertaken.

#### Walls

Garden path and main vehicle entrance on eastern side flanked by brick and mortar plastered walls with flower boxes. Flower boxes also placed at intervals with remainder of wall consisting of vibracrete.



Fig.6.8. Flower boxes E face



Fig.6.9. S face vibracrete

#### Garden

Garden was not surveyed although two large palm trees are significantly part of the landscape

#### Other features

Enclosed courtyard with sand box, asbestos water tank and washing line.

## 6.2. HISTORICAL

Historically the site was open ground immediately to the east of what was known as Irish Town in the 1890's. Irish Town Housed Irish warders for the leper colony. This remained so during WWII when the Irish Town barracks was demolished to make way for WWII residences. The open space was only built up in the mid 1970's as residences for prison

warders. House 85 appears unique and more research is required as to whether it housed a senior member of prison staff since it is larger than the other 3 in the cluster. Between 1997 and 2007 it housed the crèche for RIM, which was run by Ruth Carneson.

Ruth Carneson was born and grew up in Cape Town. When Ruth was 14 she left South Africa with her mother Sarah in the late 1960's when her father Fred, who was an active member of the SACP, was imprisoned for sedition. Her father joined them again in 1972 when he was released from prison. While in Britain she obtained her qualification in visual art. She exhibited extensively in Britain as well as producing postcards, calendars and posters. She also taught at the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College in Tanzania. The family returned from exile in 1991.

In 1997 she went to live on Robben Island as artist on residence while also running the crèche and stayed there until 2007. The house is not utilized at present.

### 6.3. SOCIAL

The murals in the courtyard are a legacy of Ruth Carneson's work with the children of the creche. Ruth's artwork was used by the ANC for marketing 'T' shirts, posters and postcards. Examples of her art can be seen in Fig.6.10 and 6.11.

Her recent works have been autobiographical installations where she has combined text with visual images, artefacts and sound. These were exhibited at the Nelson Mandela Gateway at the Waterfront and at the Scalabrini Centre in Cape Town as part of the Voyage Ensemble Exhibition.

In May 2008, Ruth Carneson, as part of Voyage Ensemble, represented South Africa at the HIFA **Festival of Determination** in Harare, Zimbabwe. She also held a very successful exhibition in March 2008 at the Lindbergh Arts Foundation. In October 2008 she was part of a Thupelo "Found Objects" workshop and group exhibition at Greatmore studios in Woodstock, Cape Town.



Fig.6.10. 'Cut out Dolls'

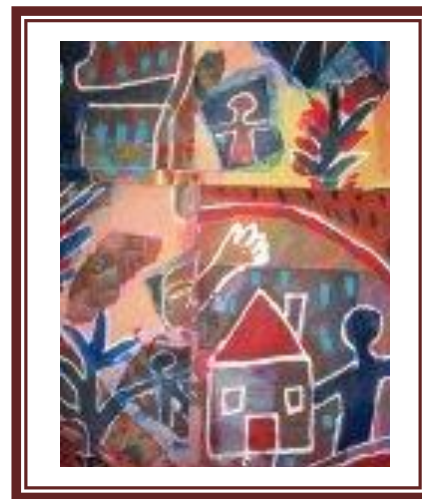
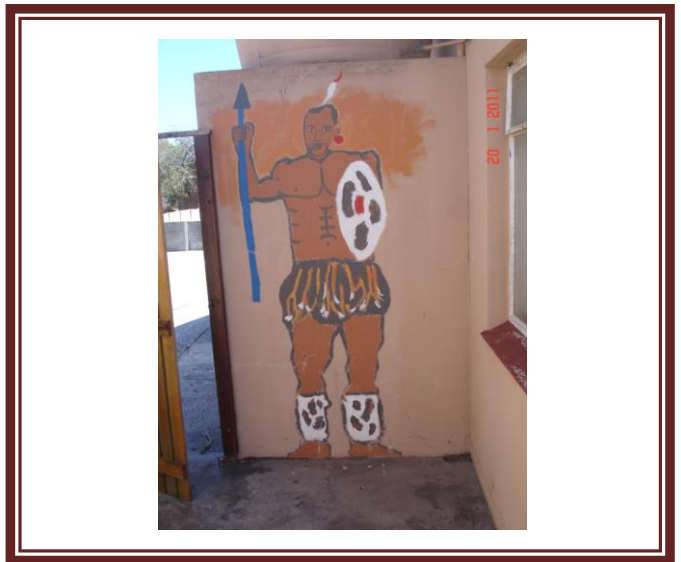
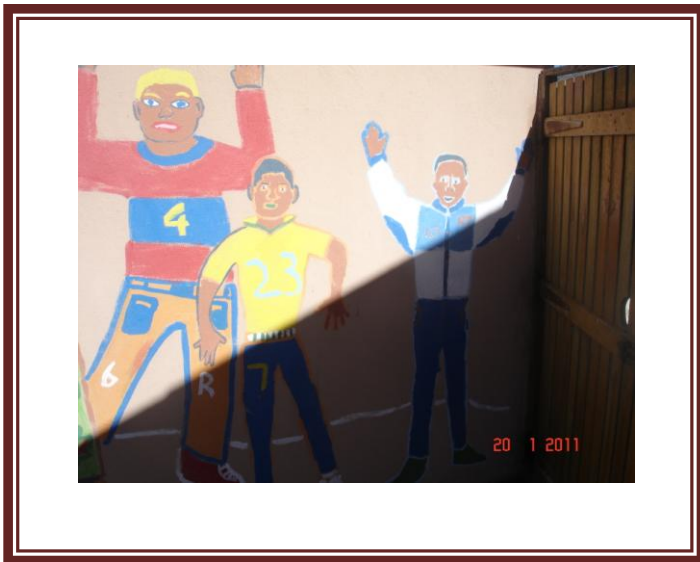


Fig.6.11. 'Home is where the heart is.'

COURTYARD IMAGES





## **6.4. TECHNOLOGICAL**

The building and its associate structures were built from Robben Island bricks. These bricks were manufactured on the island during the prison period and have a particular mix of seashells, sea sand and cement. More research is required regarding the ration and consistency of these bricks for future conservation decisions.

## **7. PROPOSED CONSERVATION POLICIES**

Appropriate minimal intervention. [do as much as is necessary and as little as possible]

Appropriate and sustainable alternate use strategy. [‘use it or lose it’]

Appropriate, effective, efficient and sustainable maintenance.

Use of appropriate construction materials, paint and cladding to fit historic fabric.

Appropriate interpretation and presentation within the associated landscape.

## **8. PRESENT STATE OF CONSERVATION**

Reasonable. Steel window frames rusted, gutters and downpipes missing in places, cracks needing repair, general maintenance is required.

## **9. CONSERVATION CHALLENGES**

### **9.1. THREATS**

#### Weather and weathering

Normal weathering. The murals are sensitive and may weather faster than other decoration.

#### Plants

The palm trees should be monitored and dead leaves removed as these may damage fabric if they fall off.

#### Animals

No discernable threat.

#### Fire

Relatively large cleared area behind house assists in preventing immediate threat from bush fires.

#### Humans –tourism, vandalism, theft

Not on tourist route. Care to be taken regarding unsurveyed interior decoration is not stolen or removed. Murals may be sensitive to vandalism but are relatively protected within enclosed courtyard.



### Pollution

Murals may be more susceptible to pollution than other decoration.

## **9.2 OPPORTUNITIES**

### Tourism

No survey undertaken

### Education

No survey undertaken

### Research

No survey undertaken

## **10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

10.1. Repairs and maintenance should be permitted as per the specifications of the conservation architect.

10.2. The murals must not be painted over. RIM must provide a conservation and maintenance management plan specifically designed for the long term conservation of these murals.

10.3. The interiors, garage and servants quarters must also be surveyed.

10.4. Provision must be made as soon as possible for repair and maintenance to the interior.

10.5. An alternate use strategy must be provided by RIM.

10.6. Dead palm leaves to be removed to prevent damage to fabric.

10.5. The boundary walls must not be washed, sealed, painted or in any other way treated. A patina has built up that protects the fabric. Removal of this patina will negatively affect the long term conservation of the fabric.

10.6. Indigenous Island vegetation should be planted in the flower boxes, as well as in the garden.

10.7. Further research is required on the history of the people who stayed here during the prison period, as well as on the people who manufactured the bricks and built the house. This will require dedicated oral research not undertaken in this survey.

## 11. REFERENCES

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Interviews, documents and materials collected by Sarah Winter.